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ABSTRACT

This bulletin highlights the comprehensive community action program developed in Fayette County, Kentucky, to lower vandalism. The program was begun several years ago and involves participation by local businesses, clubs, schools, and the police department. School assemblies, a student workbook, slides, films, contests, and a public media campaign were used in the antivandalism campaign. The program is considered a success, with a 12 percent decline in crime. (Author/MLF)

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Technical Assistance Bulletin 19

A Comprehensive Approach to Vandalism Prevention: Fayette County, Kentucky

Summary

This bulletin highlights the comprehensive community action program developed in Fayette County, Kentucky, to lower vandalism. The program was begun several years ago and involves participation by local businesses, clubs, schools, and the police department. School assemblies, a student workbook, slides, films, contests, and a public media campaign were used in the antivandalism campaign.

The Problem

The problem facing most communities in considering a vandalism prevention program is what to do and how to begin. The questions are: What is an effective program? What can be done about deterring violent crimes? How can behavior be changed to prevent these incidents? How can students be persuaded that their acts of vandalism are destructive? How are effective programs focused? Who should be involved in putting together a program? However, even after answers to these questions are formulated, the greater problem is how to begin implementation.

The Solution

In early spring 1977, Southern Railways contacted the Lexington, Kentucky, police department about beginning a vandalism prevention program. At this time, the freight line was suffering from extensive vandalism to tracks and signals and was reporting at least one vandalism incident a week. That previous September, Winburn Junior High in Lexington had suffered $10,000 in damage in what newspapers described as a "rampage": offices had been ransacked, equipment destroyed, and 21 windows broken ("Lexington Herald," May 14, 1977). Fayette County estimated property damage at $1 million a year; the school system reported $72,000 loss from vandalism.

The police department, with the aid of the chamber of commerce, appealed to various business leaders and members of the board of education to join in attacking the problem. A committee of representatives from General Telephone Company, Lextran, Yellow Cab, Southern Railway, the Association of General Contractors, the Board of Education, and several other civic groups met to form the Vandalism Abatement Program (VAP). The committee's strategy focused on education, first in the schools and then for the general public.

The committee proposed a five-fold program that included school assemblies, an educational curriculum for students, a bumper sticker contest, films and slides, and a media campaign.

A curriculum committee, consisting of several special education teachers and a police officer who had previously taught in college, met in April 1977 to develop a school curriculum and approach. In the 1½ months before school let out, they put together a

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EA 013 367

comprehensive program for junior high students. The following school year (1977-78), the program was carried out in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. (In the 1978-79 school year, no program was incorporated, although this school year (1979-80) the program will again be reinstated with the elementary grades.)

The focus of the antivandalism campaign was to make students more aware of vandalism--that it is a crime and that it costs the community thousands of dollars each year.

The curriculum development committee created a kit of materials for teachers and students that included a student workbook of quizzes and puzzles, a teacher's guide, a pamphlet on vandalism, and a slide presentation. They designed two characters used to represent the program: Randal the Vandal and Captain VAP. The first year, Randal the Vandal turned into a gorilla every time he or she committed a crime. The second year, Randal was presented as a younger child struggling with giving in to peer pressure to join with his or her friends in damaging property. Captain VAP, a science fiction superhero figure, guided Randal to make the right decisions. Both characters were used on posters and advertisements, and VAP was put in the newspapers as a cutout to be worn.

School Assemblies

The antivandalism program was introduced into 10 junior high schools in 1977 with school assemblies featuring a well-known basketball star and a local police officer. The police officer opened the program by talking about vandalism and how it directly affects the students. The approach generally used was to stress pride in schools and to impress on students that vandalism is a crime. Money spent on paying for vandalism was money that could be used more productively to purchase sports equipment, band equipment, or improve the school.

Jack "Goose" Givens, a University of Kentucky All-American basketball player, then took the floor. He answered questions about basketball and sports and then gave his feelings about the problem of vandalism stressing how destructive vandalism was. A slide presentation prepared by the police department was then shown.

In 1978 the school system brought in a second celebrity to appear in some of the school assembly programs. Captain Tag, a local Fayette County celebrity, hosts a daily helicopter traffic report and radio show on WVLK, a local radio station. Sponsored by the banks and the chamber of commerce, Tag flew his helicopter into the schools for "Captain Tag's Fly-On." Met by a safety guard of students and the school principal, he was accompanied into the auditorium and presented a talk about his helicopter, flying, and safety. Following Tag's presentation, two police officers (male and female) in uniform presented a Police Magic Safety Show which included talks about bus safety, traffic safety, and the effects of vandalism. The school was then presented a certificate, and all the students went outside to watch Tag take off.

Although the cost of renting Captain Tag's helicopter at $125 an hour was high, these sessions were extremely effective in raising student morale and interest in safety and vandalism prevention.

The key figure in creating interest at the assemblies was the celebrity. Basketball is very popular in Kentucky, and students reacted very favorably to seeing their favorite star discuss vandalism. Similarly, Captain Tag is well known in the area, and students were eager to meet and listen to him. The celebrity not only appealed to the students but attracted media coverage as well.

Bumper Sticker Contest

A bumper sticker contest was also sponsored in the junior high schools. Two winning slogans were selected from each school, and winners were given all-expense-paid trips to a Cincinnati Reds game. The top three winners of all the junior highs were awarded savings bonds of $25, $50, and $100. Bumper stickers using the slogans were then designed and used on the backs of buses and cabs.

Curriculum Unit

After the assemblies, teachers introduced a curriculum unit on vandalism into the classroom. The teachers were supplied with a teacher's guide, and workbooks were given to students. The workbook included a math game and story entitled "The Mathematics of Vandalism, or Randal Wants a Bicycle," two crossword puzzles, and a quiz. Each year the workbook is expanded and adapted to the needs of the students. As an incentive to students to complete the workbook, a

MacDonald's coupon for a free hamburger was attached, redeemable only after the workbook was completed and signed by the teacher. (Sample pages of the workbook are included in Attachment C.)

Slide Show/Films

A 15 to 20 minute slide show developed by the police department and Southern Railways was made available to teachers and used in the classroom. The slide presentation showed scenes of vandalized property in the area. A cassette tape narrating the presentation was included. The film "The Clubhouse" was also shown at school. (More information on "The Clubhouse" is available under References.)

Media Campaign

To garner support in the community for VAP, an intense 6-week media campaign was planned with talk show appearances, radio and TV spots, and newspaper articles scheduled for each week.

To launch the program, the police department sponsored a press conference, VAP was introduced to the public, and police officers made presentations to local participating groups. As a followup, TV reporters visited several schools and interviewed students and teachers.

Interviews on local public affairs programs and talk shows were also scheduled. Police officers, Southern Railway representatives, and others involved with the program appeared on as many of the shows as possible including "Noon Today" (NBC), "The June Rollings Show," and "Focus" (ABC).

The director of public information for the Lexington schools writes, produces, directs, and hosts a series of programs entitled "Fayette County Schools in Action" which are aired on local ABC, CBS, and NBC stations. Several programs on vandalism prevention and the VAP program were also produced, and interviews were held with teachers, administrators, security people, and police.

Press releases were sent to the media and newspapers to cover in-school assemblies and the bumper sticker contest. News specials focusing on vandalism on the buses, on the trains, and at home were suggested to area TV producers. Media events were created as often as possible: press conferences, school programs, appearances of a blue-grass band sponsoring the program at a Law Enforcement Week program at a local mall.

Radio and TV public service announcements (PSA's) were also scheduled for airing each week. They advertised the VAP program as well as the bumper sticker contest and other activities of the program. The police department supplied scripts for the spots. For TV presentations, they forwarded slides and a script to the station. The station announcers or local celebrities then narrated the presentation. (Sample radio spots and more information on PSA's are included in Attachments A and B.)

Community Support

Various community groups contributed to the overall VAP program. A few of these groups and their contributions are--

- The Chamber of Commerce--The Lexington Chamber of Commerce served as a coordinating body to bring various groups concerned with the vandalism problem together. As a neutral body concerned with bettering the community, they knew what groups to contact and how to help organize a campaign. The Chamber of Commerce donated a small amount of money for supplies and the film "The Clubhouse" and also sponsored the first six of Captain Tag's Fly-Ons.

- Southern Railways--Southern Railways was intensely interested in the VAP project and provided about $1,500 for the program. They have since helped institute similar programs in Louisville, Elizabethtown, and Rome, Georgia. To help publicize the beginnings of VAP, the railway sponsored an old fashioned barbeque: they roasted a 200-pound hog over hickory coals and invited the media and newspaper people to attend. They also sponsored a country band at a local mall during Law Enforcement Week which promoted VAP. Southern Railways gathered slides of vandalized railcars and tracks for slide shows.

- Lextran--Lextran, Lexington's bus system, services about 4 million riders a year with 52 buses.

They average about $500 to $1,000 a month in damages due to vandalism--slashing of seats, cigarette burns to seats, and graffitti. Their contribution to VAP was in terms of commitment and advertisement. Stickers and signs were used on the interiors and backs of buses, and brochures featuring Randal the Vandal were also distributed to passengers.

- General Telephone Company--General Telephone Company donated $150 to the project and sent a representative to the VAP interagency meetings. They supplied the police department with slides of vandalism to their telephone lines and equipment.

Results

Fayette County's Vandalism Abatement Program is considered a success. Police noted a 12 percent decline in crime, and Southern Railways reported that vandalism to the railways was also appreciably lowered (as much as 75 percent). Lextran also noted less vandalism to their buses.

The Lexington Police Department's Community Services Section was given the 1978 Kentucky State Bar Association Liberty Bell Award for outstanding achievement in community service--the highest State award for a community project.

Replication Issues

The kind of program developed in Fayette County (involving many community members and resources) can be replicated elsewhere. This program was developed to fit Fayette County's particular needs, but similar programs can be initiated to involve elements of any community and provide activities for community involvement.

Required Resources

The total budget for Fayette County's Vandalism Abatement Program probably never exceeded $5,000. Money was donated by businesses, the chamber of commerce, and other civic groups.

The chief organizers were two officers in the police department's Community Services Division who worked many hours gathering and developing material. Other volunteers added support and knowledge to make the program work.

Reference

"The Clubhouse"

Designed for use with children, "The Clubhouse" is an unusual film because it approaches vandalism from a child's point of view. It's about four young boys who have built a clubhouse--their own private headquarters. One day, while the boys are playing, the youngest accepts a dare and throws a rock through a school window. Soon all four are breaking windows. When the police arrive, one boy is caught while the others run away to hide in their clubhouse ... only to find that it, too, has been vandalized.

"The Clubhouse" has been acclaimed as a film with which children can identify, as it explains the meaning of vandalism with concepts children understand. Guidelines are supplied with each print to help you start and direct group discussion.

Available from:

Harper and Row Media
Order Fulfillment/Customer Service
2350 Virginia Avenue
Hagerstown, MD 21740

Order No. CH-068
16mm color sound film
Running Time: 10 minutes
Price: $175. Rental: $60/week

Policies for 16mm film examination:

All 16mm films may be ordered on approval and returned without obligation, if undamaged, within the 7-day preview period.

Materials held beyond the preview period will be invoiced at a weekly rental rate plus a $10 late return charge, which can be cancelled only if a firm order is received before the weekly overdue charges total the full purchase price, at which time no return is permitted and the total billed is due and payable.

We cannot guarantee availability of preview copies on specific dates. Requests are filled in the order received, except that those submitted on a Purchase Order will be shipped first.

Prices are subject to change without notice.

Attachments

Attachment A - Sample PSA Radio Spots

Attachment B - Information on Developing Public Service Announcements

Attachment C - Workbook Ideas: Sample Crossword Puzzles

For further information on this program, or to request direct technical assistance in implementing a similar program, contact the National Center or the Regional Center nearest you. NSRN technical assistance is available at no cost to requestors.

Attachment A

SAMPLE PSA RADIO SPOTS

"VAP"

VANDALISM ABATEMENT PROGRAM (Your head)

(RADIO PSA)

(:30)

EVERY YEAR THOUSANDS OF LEXINGTON RESIDENTS AND THEIR PERSONAL PROPERTY ARE AFFECTED BY ACTS OF VANDALISM. NO ONE IS IMMUNE TO THE ACTS OF VANDALS--NOT OUR SCHOOLS, OUR PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS, OUR RAILROADS, OUR PERSONAL PROPERTY. VANDALISM HURTS YOU. JOIN THE VANDALISM ABATEMENT PROGRAM SPONSORED BY THE LEXINGTON URBAN COUNTY POLICE COMMUNITY RELATIONS DEPARTMENT. VANDALISM HURTS.

(:20)

VAP IS OUT TO ZAP VANDALS. VAP STANDS FOR THE VANDALISM ABATEMENT PROGRAM BY THE LEXINGTON URBAN COUNTY POLICE COMMUNITY RELATIONS DEPARTMENT. JOIN VAP AND PUT THE ZAP ON VANDALS IN YOUR SCHOOL, PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM AND, YES, IN YOUR OWN HOME.

(:10)

VANDALISM HURTS. IT HURTS YOU, ME AND THE PUBLIC PROPERTY SUCH AS SCHOOLS AND BUSES THAT WE ALL MUST DEPEND ON. VAP VANDALISM IN LEXINGTON AND FAYETTE COUNTY. JOIN THE VANDALISM ABATEMENT PROGRAM. LEXINGTON URBAN COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT.

Attachment B

Information on Developing Public Service Announcements (PSA's)

Local radio and TV stations air PSA's regularly (the number varies according to their contracts with the FCC). Local public service directors will often aid in developing materials for broadcast. Other ways of gathering help include--

1. Contacting the local advertising club and finding out who might be willing to aid. The American Advertising Federation, 1225 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, can give you information on local clubs.

2. Contacting the local public relations society or the Public Relations Society of America, 845 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022, for information on public relations firms.

3. Directly contacting a local ad agency and enlisting their aid as volunteers or paying them.

4. Calling public service directors at TV and radio stations and asking their help in preparing spots. (The willingness of directors to put together material varies from community to community.)

Note: Vast numbers of PSA's are submitted to stations. Directors are concerned with the topic and the quality of product in making choices as to what will be broadcast.

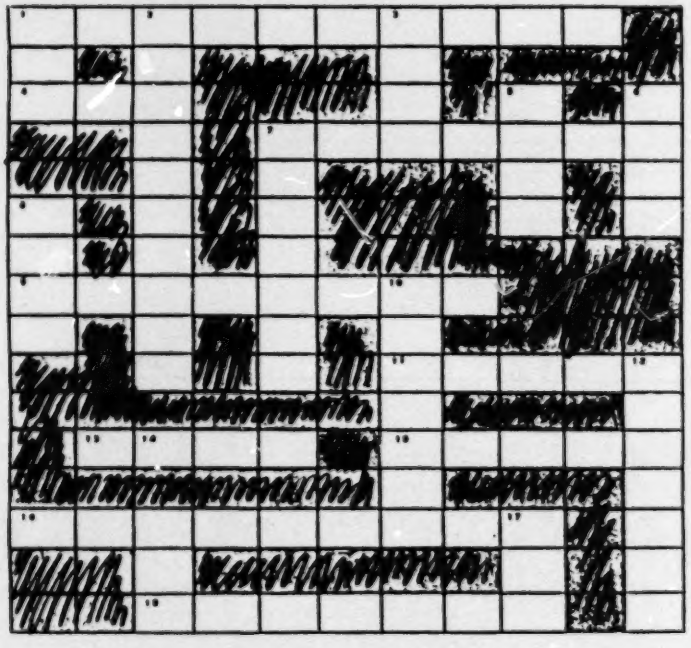
WORKBOOK IDEAS: SAMPLE CROSSWORD PUZZLES

ACROSS

1. Parks and _____ Department.
4. _____ and I won't cause vandalism.
7. Vandalism in our country doesn't cost a million dollars a year, it causes more than a _____ dollars each year.
9. Little _____ should have love and discipline.
11. When frustrated, we show _____
13. Obey all _____
15. Recreation at the _____ is fun.
16. _____ are young people who sometimes let their friends influence them.
18. Let's go see a movie at the _____

DOWN

2. Giving advice is called _____
3. _____ authorities when you witness vandalism.
5. Take _____ to make wise decisions.
6. Do you _____ if your friends obey the law?
7. Having nothing to do may cause _____, which may lead to vandalism.
8. It is always best to _____ doors, garages and windows.
10. Teach by your own _____
12. _____ the law and other people's property.
14. An _____ student can often prevent _____
17. _____ is a title of respect.



ACROSS

1. Words written on public property.
3. Initials for Vandalism Abatement Program.
5. $158,520 of damage done to these public buildings in Fayette County during the past three years.
6. There is no _____ at being inconsiderate.
7. Malicious mischief to someone's property is called _____ .
11. _____ "Goose" Givens.
12. Don't accept someone's _____ to cause vandalism.
13. _____ of incidents of vandalism are reported in this country each year.
15. Often farm _____ is also vandalized.
17. Property damage causes _____ headaches.
18. These places of worship are often profanely vandalized.
19. Wanton destruction causes waste and _____.

DOWN

2. When vandals burn property it is called _____
4. I must do my _____ to prevent vandalism.
7. An innocent person who is vandalized is called a _____ _____
8. An object on a train track may cause the train's _____
9. Vandalism didn't make the English teacher angry; it made him _____
10. Lex-Tran _____ were vandalized to the tune of $9,000 last year.
14. More than 4,500 cases or _____ were reported in Fayette County last year.
16. Money used to repair damage to public property comes from our federal and state _____
18. The taxi _____ companies are vandalized, too.